

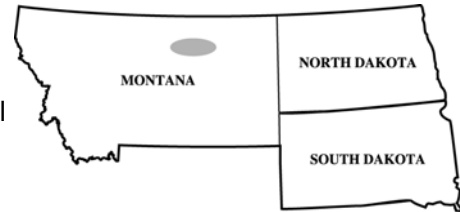


August 2004

Black-Footed Ferret and Prairie Dog Management

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

- The black-footed ferret is the most endangered mammal in North America and it is on the first list under the Endangered Species Act.
- In February 2000, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) found that the black-tailed prairie dog was warranted for listing as a Threatened Species but named it a Candidate Species due to higher priorities. This designation falls under BLM's Special Status Species Direction, which means that any action we authorize, fund, or carry out cannot contribute to the need to list prairie dogs under the provisions of the Endangered Species Act.
- There is extensive prairie dog habitat on BLM lands throughout Montana; prairie dog towns in southern Phillips County and in southeastern Montana (Miles City Field Office) are crucial for planned black-footed ferret reintroduction efforts.
- Since recovery of the endangered ferret depends on healthy prairie dog populations, BLM is an essential player in the conservation of prairie ecosystems and the associated species.



HOW DID WE GET HERE?

- Under the Judith–Valley–Phillips Resource Management Plan (RMP), we have managed prairie dog towns to provide habitat for black-footed ferrets and associate species (mountain plover, burrowing owl, and ferruginous hawk), plus provide opportunities for recreational viewing and shooting.
- In cooperation with other agencies, we maintain the prairie dog habitat and distribution on BLM land within an area known as the 7km Complex at the 1988 level (26,000 acres of prairie dog towns: 12,346 BLM acres, 5,800 FWS acres, 2,012 state acres and 5,821 private acres).
- In July 1992, a disease believed to be sylvatic plague began to reduce the prairie dog population; by 1996, up to 80 percent of the prairie dogs in Phillips County were lost.
- In 1993, we began to discourage prairie dog shooting on BLM land to allow the prairie dog population to recover.
- In 1998, we imposed a voluntary shooting closure on 15 prairie dog towns (40 Complex and Pea Ridge).
- In October 1999, we formally closed 15 of the 228 (now 305) prairie dog towns on BLM lands in south Phillips County to recreational shooting.



- In 2001, the Montana Legislature passed a law allowing the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to manage the black-tailed prairie dog as a “species in need of management.” Agricultural groups, environmental groups, and members of the Prairie Dog Working Group lobbied in support of this bill. The new FWP regulations for managing prairie dogs on public lands went into effect on March 1, 2002.
- Twenty ferrets were released in two prairie dog towns within the “40 Complex” on November 9, 2001. While monitoring with spotlights at night early in December, researchers located seven ferrets on the two original towns and on a third where none were released. Because spotlighting is not precise, the seven ferrets were considered to be the minimum number surviving.
- In the spring of 2002, two ferrets (a male and female) were found that survived the winter; the first litter of two was found in August 2002. Twenty-five more ferrets were released in November 2002.
- Five ferrets were found in the spring of 2003: four males and one female. A litter of at least four and maybe five kits was found in August 2003. Twenty more ferrets were released in October 2003.
- In the spring of 2004 surveyers found a minimum of three ferrets.
- In June 2004, plague was found in one prairie dog town within the “40 Complex.”



WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- Conservation actions are necessary to prevent the prairie dog from being federally listed and to assist with black-footed ferret recovery efforts.

WHO ELSE IS CONCERNED?

- The Predator Conservation Alliance, Defenders of Wildlife, the Nature Conservancy, and the National Wildlife Federation have asked BLM to manage prairie dogs on BLM lands for ferret reintroduction.
- Other groups such as the Phillips County Commissioners, Malta Chamber of Commerce, and local ranchers have asked BLM to manage prairie dogs or allow natural recovery according to the Judith-Valley-Phillips Resource Management Plan.
- BLM has been an integral partner in the Montana Prairie Dog Working Group (made up of landowners, federal/state agencies and conservation groups) since its inception in 1996. We have also been a partner in the Montana Black-Footed Ferret Working Group (made up of state/federal agencies, and landowners in the Phillips County area) since its inception in 1984.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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